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ABSTRACT

Three variables, derived from Blau's (1955) analysis of consultation networks among federal agents and Homans' (1961) social exchange analysis, were manipulated to observe their effects on help seeking. Subjects were presented with a hypothetical situation where help was needed. Subjects indicated that they would be more likely to seek help from a friend than a nonfriend; more likely to seek help when it could be repaid than when it could not but only when asking another of higher status; and more likely to seek help from another of equal status rather than higher status but only when repayment was not anticipated. Consistent with social exchange theory, expected rewards and costs were found to be related to the expressed likelihood of help seeking. (Author)

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FRIENDSHIP, STATUS, AND REPAYMENT AS FACTORS IN SEEKING HELP*

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FRIENDSHIP, STATUS, AND REPAYMENT AS FACTORS
IN SEEKING HELP

While a vast literature exists on factors which affect person's provision of aid to another, little research has focused on conditions under which a person in need will seek help from another. This study manipulated three factors suggested by Blau's (1955) analysis of consultation networks among agents in a federal bureaucracy and by Homans' (1961) interpretation of these consultation networks in terms of social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory views behavior as an exchange of acts which are more or less rewarding to the actors. Therefore, analyzing behavior according to social exchange theory directs attention to the rewards and costs of behavior. Behavior is explained by assuming that actors behave in a manner which maximizes expected rewards and minimizes expected costs.[1] According to social exchange, the likelihood of seeking help should be positively related to expected rewards and negatively related to expected costs.

In his study of federal bureaucracy, Blau found that the usual consultation patterns were for agents to regularly seek help from one or two agents of apporximately the same level of competence as themselves. Blau and Homans explain this pattern by noting the costs involved in asking another for help, as well as the rewards, and how two factors, friendship and reciprocation of help, associated with these consultation pairs affected the costs. In the federal agency studied, the primary reward value of the help sought was being able to do one's job better, while the primary cost of seeking help was implied inferiority.

Since the consultation networks which were established involved friendship ties and allowed for the reciprocation of help, the costs of

asking for help were substantially less than if an expert were to be asked for help. According to Blau (1955:109) the cost of seeking help became prohibitive if the helper refused to provide the help or was in any way discouraging, therefore:

> To avoid such rejection, agents usually consulted a colleague with whom they were friendly, even if he was not an expert....The establishment of partnerships of mutual consultation virtually eliminated the danger of rejection as well as the status threat implicit in asking for help, since the roles of questioner and consultant were intermittently reversed. (Underlining added for emphasis.)

This study manipulates independently the two variables suggested by Blau, the friendliness of the relationship between the helper and help seeker and the ability of the help seeker to repay the help. By manipulating each variable independent of the other, the problem of the variables being confounded with each other, as was the case for Blau, is avoided. Following Blau, it is hypothesized that, because of the reduction of perceived rejection and status threat associated with friendship and repayment, a person would be more likely to ask for help from a friend rather than a non-friend and more likely to seek help when he expects to be able to repay the helper for the help received than when repayment is not anticipated.

In addition to the two costs of seeking help mentioned by Blau, a third cost of help seeking has been discussed by Greenberg and Shapiro (1972) in one of the few studies of help seeking. Consistent with Blau, Greenberg and Shapiro found that subjects who perceived that they could repay the other for help received asked for help more often and accepted more help than subjects who perceived that they would be unable to repay

the other. They explain these results by claiming that persons experience an aversive psychological state of indebtedness when they receive help from another and that repayment permits a reduction in this aversive state. In their study, the effects of repayment were found even though perceptions of repayment did not affect the perceived probability of being given help if it were asked for nor, because of the nature of the task and the reason why help was needed, did the request for help involve status loss.

The third variable that was manipulated in this study was the formal status of the potential helper vis-a-vis the help seeker. In the Blau study the fact that the statuses of the agents were approximately equal in the federal agency may have helped to account for the pattern of consultation that developed because it increased the costs of seeking help. Homans observed that a person who is already another's inferior has less status to lose in asking for help from him than a person who begins as his equal.

It was hypothesized that, because of the cost of status loss, seeking help from another would be more likely when the other would be of superior formal status than when the other would be of similar status. Such a relationship might also be expected on the basis of the reward value of the help. Moore (1968), Berger, Cohen, and Zeldetch (1966, 1972) and others have found that status differences tend to produce differential performance expectations even if the status has no direct relevance to the task situation. Therefore, it might be expected that help received from someone who is of higher status would be seen as higher quality and more valuable than help coming from someone of similar status.

Three potential costs of seeking help and one potential reward factor of seeking help have been discussed above. Because social exchange theory

predicts that the likelihood of seeking help should be related to expected rewards and costs, questionnaire measures of each of these four factors were also collected in this study. Help seeking should be greater as help is perceived to be more valuable--better quality and conversely the less likely help will be sought, the more it is expected to cost to seek help--the more likely the request for help might be refused, the greater the status loss, and the greater the discomfort experienced when asking for help.

METHOD

Eighty male and female undergraduates at the University of Iowa were administered a questionnaire during a normal class period of their sociology course. They were asked to read a description of a situation which might face students and to imagine themselves in that situation. The students were then asked to answer the questions that followed in terms of how they would act and how they would feel if they were actually in the situation.

Each of the students was given a questionnaire which contained one of the eight hypothetical situations produced by the 2 X 2 X 2 experimental design. Subjects were randomly assigned to experimental condition. The three independent variables in the 2 X 2 X 2 design were the status of the helper vis-a-vis the help seeker (higher or equal in status), the friendliness of their relationship (friendly or not friendly), and the opportunity to repay the other for the help received (repayment or no repayment).

Each of the eight situations began with the following paragraph:

> You are taking a required course in your major area. One week before the final exam while reviewing your notes you discover that you are unable to under-

stand much of the material that will be on the exam. There is only one person whom you might ask to help you study for the exam, Person A.

This type of situation was chosen because it represented a relevant and possibly familiar situation for the subject population.

The status of the other and the friendliness of the relationship were manipulated by varying the description of Person A, as indicated below:

> Person A is a(n) (graduate/undergraduate) student who is taking this course. During the course the two of you (have been/have not been) very friendly. In fact, during the semester the two of you have spoken with each other (almost every day/only a few times).

In the no repayment condition, the description of the situation terminated with the above paragraph describing Person A. Repayment was manipulated by adding the following to the description of the situation in the repayment condition:

> In addition to this class, Person A is taking another course that you are taking. In this other course "A" has missed quite a few lectures and you know that "A" would benefit if "A" could get some help in studying for the exam in that course.

The primary dependent variable in this study, the expressed likelihood of asking for help was measured by asking the subjects to:

> Indicate your likelihood of asking "A" to help you study by checking the appropriate category.

They were given twenty-one categories running in 5% steps from 0%, certain I would not ask for help, to 100%, certain I would ask for help.

Expectations of rewards and costs associated with asking another for help were then obtained. Perceived probability of receiving help, a cost, was measured by asking subjects to:

> Indicate your estimate of the likelihood that "A" would help you study, <u>if you asked</u>, by checking the appropriate category.

They were given 21 categories running in 5% steps from 0%, certain "A" would not, to 100%, certain "A" would.

The reward value of seeking help, the quality of the help, was measured by asking the subjects to:

> Indicate your estimate of the quality of "A's" help by circling the appropriate number below.

The subjects were given a 21 point scale running from +10, very good, to -10 very poor.

Status loss, a cost of seeking help was measured by asking subjects to:

> Indicate your impression of how <u>"A's" evaluation of you</u> would <u>change</u> if you asked "A" to help you study.

The subjects were given three 21 point scales ranging from +10, much more favorable, to 0, no change, to -10, much less favorable. Of primary interest was the scale which indicated the perceptions of "A's" overall evaluation of them. In addition subjects were presented with a scale measuring "A's" evaluation of your intelligence, and one measuring "A's" evaluation of your motivation.

The final variable measured was discomfort associated with help seeking, a cost. Subjects were asked to:

> Indicate how uncomfortable you would feel asking "A" to help you study.

Subjects were given a scale running from 0, no discomfort, to 10, very uncomfortable.

RESULTS

Independent variables and help seeking:

The average likelihood of asking for help indicated by all eighty subjects was 76%, no doubt reflecting the importance students would place on passing a required course and the obviousness of the need for help in the situation. The effects of the three independent variables may be seen in the analysis of variance table, Table 1.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As was predicted, subjects indicated that they would be more likely to request help from a friend than a non-friend. The mean likelihood of seeking help from "A" was 83% for subjects who had "A" described as a friend compared to 69% for those subjects who had "A" described as not friendly. The hypothesized main effects for the status of the other and the ability to repay for the help were not found to be significant. However, there was a significant interaction, shown in Figure 1, between the status of the other and repayment.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

A test of the simple main effects indicated that when there was no anticipation of repayment, subjects indicated that help would be significantly more likely ($F = 4.02$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$) to be sought from a student of

equal status, an undergraduate, than from a student of higher status, a graduate student. When repayment was anticipated, status did not significantly affect the expressed likelihood of seeking help ($F < 1.00$). Repayment was not significant ($F = 1.14$; $df = 1.76$; $p < .50$) when the other was of similar status, but when the other was of higher status, subjects indicated they would be more likely to seek help if repayment was anticipated ($F = 3.11$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .08$) than if it were not.

Expected rewards and costs and help seeking:

Considering help seeking in social exchange terms, as do Homans and Blau, suggests that one should expect to find relationships between the expected rewards and costs of seeking help and the expressed likelihood of seeking help. The costs of seeking help should be reflected in the degree of discomfort associated with asking another for help and the loss of status associated with seeking help. The perceived probability of receiving help if requested should also indicate a cost of seeking help, while the reward value of the help should be reflected by the evaluation of the quality of the help to be received.

A within cell correlation analysis indicated that the higher the perception of the quality of help, the more likely one would be to ask for help ($r = .41$; $p < .001$). Similarly, the higher the perceived probability of receiving help, the more likely one would be to seek help ($r = .23$; $p < .05$). The best indicator of the cost of seeking help appeared to be the expected amount of discomfort experienced when asking for help. The more uncomfortable one expected to feel in asking for help, the lower the expressed likelihood of seeking help ($r = .53$, $p < .001$).

It has been expected that the loss of status associated with seeking help would be strongly related to the expressed likelihood of seeking help;

however, only two of the eighty subjects reported that asking for help would negatively effect the other's overall evaluation of them. The other seventy-eight subjects reported that it would not effect the other's evaluation of them or would, in fact, make them appear more favorable to the other. This, then would indicate that, in this study, subjects did not see seeking help as involving the cost of loss of status, but rather a reward, gain of status. There was a marginal significant relationship between the expressed likelihood of seeking help ($r = .20$; $p < .10$) and the expected effect seeking help would have on the impression one gave off to others.

Friendship and the interaction of status and repayment account for about 12% of the variation in the indicated likelihood of seeking help. When the perceived quality of help--an indicator of the reward value--and amount of discomfort associated with seeking help--an indicator of the cost of help seeking--are added to the regression model, the amount of explained variation increases to 46%. The addition of perceived probability of receiving help and of status loss to the regression equation increases the variation explained only slightly to 48%.

Independent variables and expected rewards and costs:

The effects of the independent variables on anticipated rewards and costs associated with seeking help can be seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

From Blau, one might expect that the perceived probability of receiving help should be affected by the friendliness of the relationship and the ability to repay the help. Subjects who would be requesting help

from a friend felt they would be more likely to receive help than subjects requesting help from a non-friend ($F = 7.07$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .01$). However, the perceived probability of receiving help was not affected by the ability to repay ($F < 1$) nor by the status-repayment interaction ($F = 1$). As would be expected, the perceived probability of receiving help was related to the discomfort associated with seeking help (within cell $r = -.25$; $p < .05$) with subjects reporting less discomfort the higher their perceptions of the likelihood of receiving help.

The perception of the quality of the help was not significantly affected by the status of the helper ($F = 1.79$; $df = 1.72$; $p > .18$), but the status-repayment interaction did significantly affect the subjects' perceptions of the quality of the help ($F = 6.35$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .02$). The analysis of the simple main effects indicated no significant effect for the status of the other when there was no anticipation of repayment, but when repayment was anticipated help coming from a higher status other was seen to be better than help coming from an equal status other ($F = 7.44$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .01$). Repayment, indicating reciprocal need for help, did not significantly affect the perceptions of the quality of help coming from a helper of higher status, but when the other was of equal status the quality of help was seen to be lower when the other might need help that the subject could furnish ($F = 4.96$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$).

The impression one gives off by asking another for help had been expected to be affected by the ability to repay and the status of the helper. Neither factor affected one's evaluation of how asking for help would effect how they would be seen by the other (F's < 1), nor was the status-repayment interaction significant ($F = 1.35$; $df = 1.72$; $p > .20$). The one factor which did affect these evaluations was the friendliness

of the relationship; asking a person who you were not friendly with for help was seen to result in a more favorable impression than asking for help from a friend ($F = 6.41$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$).

The reported amount of discomfort associated with asking another for help was not significantly affected by status, repayment, nor the status-repayment interaction (F's < 1). However, subjects reported more discomfort when the help was to be sought from a non-friend than a friend ($F = 7.83$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .01$); in addition, there was a significant ($F = 7.47$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .01$) friendship-repayment interaction. An analysis of the simple main effects determined that friendship significantly affected the amount of discomfort associated with seeking help only when there was no expectation of repayment ($F = 12.16$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .001$). When one did not have the expectation of repayment, one reported more discomfort if a non-friend rather than a friend were to be asked; however, when one expected to repay the help, asking a non-friend did not entail any more discomfort than asking a friend. Subjects also reported less discomfort if asking a non-friend for help when they could repay then if they did not expect to repay the help ($F = 3.995$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$). Repayment had no significant affect on discomfort when subjects were to ask a friend for help ($F = 1.07$; $df = 1.72$; $p > .15$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are consistent with the notion that persons are more likely to seek help from a friend than from someone with whom they are not friendly. Subjects not only indicated that they would be more likely to seek help from a friend, but also felt that they would be more likely to receive help from the other if he were a friend rather than a non-friend. Furthermore, they indicated they would experience less discomfort in asking

a friend for help than a non-friend, especially if they did not anticipate being able to reciprocate. These results are consistent with the exchange theory explanation of the consultation patterns observed by Blau (1956).

While the effect of friendship on seeking help was as expected and can be explained by the costs involved in seeking help--the discomfort associated with seeking help and the expectation of possibly being refused help--the effects of the other two independent variables, status and repayment, were neither as expected nor can they be explained by reference only to the costs involved in seeking help. An explanation of their effects on help seeking must include a consideration of the expected rewards as well as the expected costs of seeking help. From Blau (1956), Homans (1961), and Greenberg and Shapiro (1972), it had been expected that help would more likely be sought when the other was of higher rather than equal status and when the person expected to be able to repay the other for the help. In this study neither status nor repayment alone affected the expressed likelihood of seeking help, but together they significantly did so. Subjects indicated they would be more likely to seek help from an equal status other rather than a higher status other, but only when one did not anticipate being able to repay the other in kind, and more likely to seek help when repayment was expected, but only from another of higher status.

An explanation of this interaction effect involves a consideration of these two variables' effects on the expected costs and rewards of seeking help. It had been expected that the status of the other would affect the amount of status loss associated with seeking help and also the perceived quality of the help to be received. In this study seeking help did not involve status loss, as to be discussed in more detail later,

and status alone did not affect the perceptions of the quality of the help, but interacted with repayment. When repayment was anticipated, help from an equal status other was seen to be less valuable than from a higher status other. The perceived quality of the help was not affected by status when no repayment was expected.

Repayment had been expected to affect help seeking by reducing the discomfort associated with seeking help. In their study, Greenberg and Shapiro (1971), had used this notion to predict the greater help seeking when subjects expected to be able to repay the other. However, the expectation of repayment not only suggests that one can reciprocate the other's help, but also that the other needs help as well. Freeze and Cohen (1973) indicated that performance on one task is generalized to performance expectations on other tasks, even if the tasks are not related. Therefore, the quality of help to be received from someone who also needs help may be suspect. Neither equal status not expected repayment, signifying the others need for help, alone were enough to reduce the perceived quality of the help to be reduced but both factors working together did so. The quality of the help, the reward value, to be received from an equal status other who also needed help was seen to be lower than the quality of help to be received from high status others regardless of their need for help and equal status others who did not need help.

The effect of repayment on reducing discomfort associated with help seeking should have its greater effect when one feels uncomfortable in asking for help. If one does not feel uncomfortable in the absence of repayment, then repayment might be expected to have little effect.

Weinstein, De Vaugn, and Wiley (1969) found that friends were less concerned with immediately repaying for help received than strangers. In this study expecting to seek help from friends produced less discomfort than from non-friends, therefore one might expect repayment to affect reported discomfort only for non-friends. This is what was found; when help was to be sought from a friend, repayment had no significant effect on discomfort associated with help seeking. However if seeking help from a non-friend, subjects felt they would experience less discomfort if they expected to be able to repay the other.

The quality of the help to be received can be seen as the primary reward of seeking help and the discomfort associated with help seeking as the primary cost. According to Homans (1961), profit = rewards - costs. Scores for perceived quality and discomfort were standardized, and a measure of profit was created. In the regression model, which controls for profit, the status repayment interaction effect was reduced to insignificance ($F = 1$; $p > .3$). This result implies that perceived profit--rewards minus costs--serves as an intervening variable between the status-repayment interaction and the likelihood of seeking help.

By considering the effect of repayment on perceived quality as well as reducing discomfort associated with receiving help from another, the results of the Greenberg and Shapiro (1972) study can be reconciled with the results of this study. In their study, when they found a main effect for repayment, they used a confederate who was a stranger to the subjects. The relationship between the subjects and the other could be characterized as non-friends. As noted before for subjects in this study, repayment reduced discomfort when the other was a non-friend. Furthermore, in the Greenberg and Shapiro study, the quality of help to be received from the

other was not an issue since all subjects saw the other perform the task in an identical way. In this study there was a near significant ($p < .10$) three-way interaction between status, friendship and repayment on the likelihood of seeking help. In order to determine if this interaction could be used to help understand the effect of repayment, simple main effects analyses were conducted for the simple effects of repayment. Repayment significantly affected the expressed likelihood of seeking help in this study only when the other was of higher status and a non-friend ($F = 6.45$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$). This condition, where the quality of help to be received is not suspect and where repayment affects the discomfort associated with seeking help, corresponds to the situation in the Greenberg and Shapiro study where a main effect for repayment was observed.

One rather surprising finding in this study was that the subjects did not believe that seeking help would produce status loss, in fact, subjects felt that seeking help would actually make them appear more favorable. The lack of status loss may have been due to the subjects perceiving the request for help as a one-time request; and as Blau (1955) notes, asking another for advice occasionally does not involve much cost in self-respect, while the more often one consults another the more threatening it becomes. However, this does not explain the fact that the subjects actually felt that asking for help would change the other's overall evaluation of them to make it even more favorable ($t = 10.83$; $df = 79$; $p < .001$).

One might explain this by considering what information is given off to others by the act of seeking help. First, it indicates that the person is unable to solve the task by himself and therefore may imply some individual inadequacy. In the situation used in the study, being unable to understand class notes, seeking help might be expected to be

related to intelligence. In addition to this information, asking another for help indicates that one is concerned with doing well on the task. Therefore, seeking help may imply that a person is concerned and motivated. In this study no status loss was associated with ratings of intelligence. Subjects reported that seeking help would not significantly affect the other's evaluation of how intelligent they were ($t < 1$). However, they did feel that asking for help would make them appear more motivated ($t = 10.65$; $df = 79$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, seeking help when it was costly, when asking a non-friend for help, was seen to lead to a greater increase in the other's overall evaluation ($F = 6.41$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$) and specific evaluation of the motivation of the help seeker ($F = 4.69$; $df = 1.72$; $p < .05$) than when asking a friend for help.

The results of this study are generally consistent with the social exchange approach which seeks to explain behavior by considering the expected rewards and costs of the behavior. The expressed likelihood of subjects seeking help was related to their expectations of the rewards and costs involved. However, the predicted effects for the three independent variables generated from a social exchange perspective were only partially supported. The reason for this was that the independent variables did not affect the expected rewards and costs associated with seeking help in the manner which had been predicted. This indicates that if one wishes to use a social exchange perspective for prediction and explanation, one must be able not only to identify the relevant rewards and costs of the behavior in the situation, but also must be able to accurately specify how the independent variables affect these rewards and costs.

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FOOTNOTES

1 As Abbott et al (1973) note, while behavioral sociologists such as Burgess and Bushell (1969) who identify with exchange theory depreciate the concepts of expected rewards and costs, the central theorists in exchange theory, Blau (1964), Homans (1961), and Thibaut and Kelley (1959), all freely use cognitive concepts such as expectations and perceptions.

Table 1.

Analysis of Variance
for Expressed Likelihood of Help Seeking

	df	MS	F
Friendship A	1	3920.00	6.22*
Repayment B	1	151.25	<1
Status C	1	245.00	<1
A x B	1	451.25	<1
A x C	1	80.00	<1
B x C	1	2531.25	4.02**
A x B x C	1	1901.25	3.02
Within error	72	629.72	

*
$p < .02$

**
$p < .05$

Table 2

Analysis of Variance for Expected Rewards and Costs of Seeking Help

Source	df	Probability of Receiving Help		Quality of Help		Change in Overall Impression		Discomfort Associated With Seeking Help	
		MS	F	MS	F	MS	F	MS	F
Friendship A	1	3380.00	7.07*	28.80	3.57	90.45	6.41**	90.60	7.83*
Repayment B	1	180.00	<1	3.20	<1	0.11	<1	0.12	<1
Status C	1	361.25	<1	14.45	1.79	2.09	<1	1.04	<1
A x B	1	1051.25	2.20	11.25	1.39	40.33	2.8	86.39	7.47*
A x C	1	320.00	<1	12.80	1.59	0.62	<1	2.16	<1
B x C	1	500.00	1.05	51.20	6.35**	19.07	1.35	1.54	<1
A x B x C	1	61.25	<1	26.45	3.28	0.11	<1	15.43	1.43
Within error	72	478.26		8.06		14.11		11.57	

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

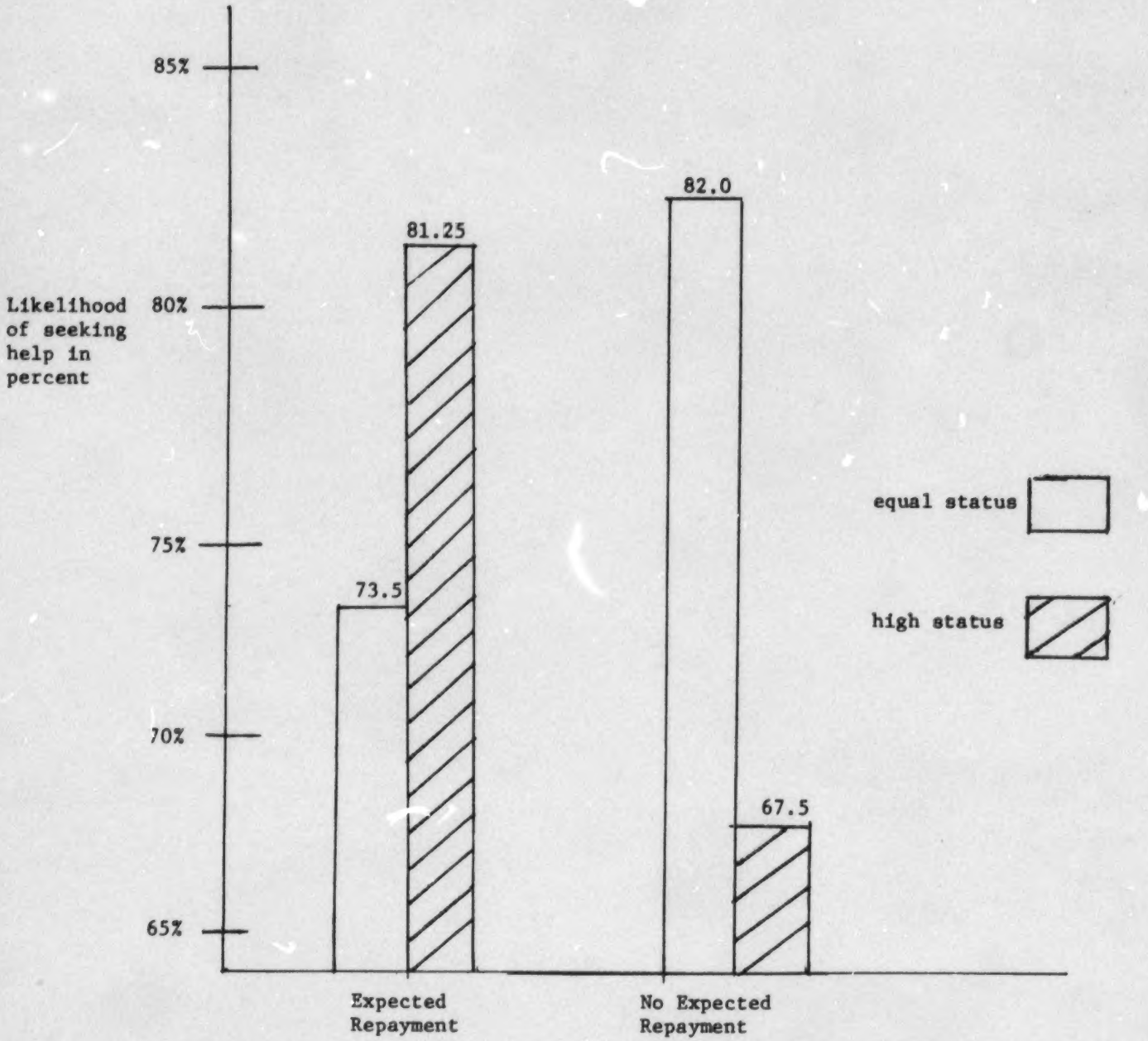

Figure 1. Mean likelihood of seeking help by status and repayment. (For each mean n = 20).